The performative turn in the assessment of student learning: a rights perspective

Bruce Macfarlane

*Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, UK**

Newer forms of assessment in higher education associated with the shift to continuous assessment are intimately connected with the growth of student performativity in higher education. This is defined as the measurement of observable student behaviours and attitudes which are audited in a public as opposed to private learning space. Drawing on a survey of almost 300 undergraduate students from a university in Hong Kong, the paper reports on the use of performative forms of assessment including attendance registers, class contribution grading and group work. Students provide both rights-based and learning-based criticisms of these forms of assessment. A minority of students use language associated with the technology of responsibilisation while the majority espouse a libertarian, rights-based view of student learning. The evidence suggests that the closer surveillance of the social attitudes and behavioural skills of students can have a number of unintended consequences including inauthentic game-playing and may undermine student freedom of choice as adult learners.

Key words: Asian Higher Education; Assessment; Performativity; Student Engagement

* Southampton Education School, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK. Email: bmachku@gmail.com

Introduction

Over the last 20 years radical changes have taken place in the way in which students are assessed in higher education. The shift toward more continuous assessment is widely regarded as 'relatively uncontentious' (Richardson, 2014:10) since it is connected with active, student-centred learning (Coates and McCormick, 2014). The diversification of assessment tools incorporates a stronger focus on group and peer learning processes seen as providing more 'valid' or 'authentic' forms of assessment relevant to employment (Bloxham and Boyd, 2007). For this reason the literature on university assessment is focused principally on the learning benefits students derive from diversification and ways of operationalizing assessment tools. The legitimacy of new forms of assessment is often accompanied by claims that they embrace the principle of assessment *for* learning. This implies students receiving feedback to enable them to improve as learners.

However, many of these newer methods of assessment are notable for their emphasis on performativity defined as the measurement of observable student behaviour and attitudes which are audited in a public as opposed to private learning space (Macfarlane, 2015). Notably these include attendance requirements, class contribution grading and the assessment of peer learning groups. The concept of performativity emerges out of the audit culture (Power, 1994; Power, 1997). Performative pressures are closely associated with the public professions, notably teaching and medicine. Increased demands for accountability via the auditing, monitoring, and evaluating of activities is also connected with a loss of trust (O'Neill, 2002). Whilst performativity has been interpreted largely in relation to the professions many of the effects of

performativity may now also be observed in the treatment of students at university. These effects include, *inter alia*, a distortion in patterns of behaviour through audit, the decline in the importance of non-audited elements, the punishment of non-compliance and a more a general loss of trust (Power, 1997; O'Neill, 2002; Murray, 2012).

The rise of student engagement

The growing emphasis on student performativity needs to be understood in the context of the rise of the student engagement movement. In the 1980s and 90s universities developed internal student feedback systems in response to increasing demands for quality assurance data. While such systems were, at first, resisted they have subsequently become institutionalized. The National Survey of Student Engagement in the US was introduced in 2000 and versions of it have subsequently been adopted in most developed higher education systems including Australia, Canada, Korea, China, Japan, New Zealand, Mexico, Ireland, South Africa and the UK (Coates and McCormick, 2014). One of the drivers for this is that mass higher education systems are associated with high levels of non-completion and student engagement initiatives have evolved, in part, to improve student completion and success rates at university. Many higher education institutions now have such a programme in place such as The Student Success Program (SSP) at the Queensland University of Technology in Australia. This is designed to identify and support those students deemed to be 'at risk of disengaging from their learning and their institution' (Nelson, et al, 2012:83).

Student engagement implies a learning environment where participants, drawn from diverse backgrounds, are actively engaged in a participatory culture and experience an adequately resourced and interactive approach to teaching (Newswander and Borrego, 2009). Hence, student engagement has a behavioural dimension which demands in-class participation. The expression 'passivity is the enemy of (student) growth' has become a guiding principle of the student engagement movement (Coates and McCormick, 2014:1). Secondly, the theory of student engagement has an emotional element in the way that students are expected to relate to others and to their learning environment and, thirdly, a cognitive dimension representing how students should construct their own understanding and learn how to learn more effectively (Fredricks, Blumenfeld and Paris, 2004).

The assumptions that inform student engagement are that anything that gets students more involved in participating at university is a good thing. It makes the process of learning more communal and, furthermore, is underpinned by the pragmatic argument that if students are engaged as learners they are more likely to complete their studies, obtain better degree results, and gain life skills suitable for the employment market (eg Allen, 1999; Astin, 1993; Kuh et al, 2008). Hence, student engagement theory and university initiatives see performativity in a positive light as contributing to learning and improving completion rates. At the heart of student engagement is the idea that students should be rewarded on the basis of 'the amount of time and effort students put into their studies and other educationally purposeful activities' (McCormick and Kinzie, 2014:14). This expectation stands in contrast with conventional expectations associated with the liberal tradition of higher education that students should be assessed on the basis of their intellectual achievements alone.

As a result of the growing emphasis on student engagement, university attendance requirements are now commonplace justified by arguments associated with student learning and in developing behavioural attitudes which match the demands of the workplace (Macfarlane, 2013). Class contribution grading has conventionally been used most extensively in a North American context (Bean and Peterson, 1998) but more recent evidence suggests that it is becoming more firmly established in other systems, such as the UK (Ni Raghallaigh and Cunniffe, 2013). The literature on assessment in higher education lends considerable support to the use of active and participative assessment tools. Group or peer learning is associated with a range of benefits including promoting co-operation rather than competition, engendering mutual respect, helping to improve understanding of cultural differences, and equipping students with the skills they need for employment and to become lifelong learners (Boud, 2001). While research shows that most students do not like group work assessment (Flint and Johnson, 2011) the literature tends to focus on the learning benefits which derive from collaborative working rather than student disquiet over issues of fairness particularly in deriving group grades. While this issue is well known and recommendations for deriving individual grades within group projects exist (eg Conway, Kember, Sivan and Wu, 1993) there is little evidence that such approaches are used extensively in practice.

Class participation is also considered to benefit students in a wide range of ways including creating an active learning environment, improved motivation, developing skills as critical thinkers, improving communication skills, working with others in groups and being better able to contribute to a democratic society. (Bean and Peterson, 1998; Rocca, 2010) Grading class participation is often justified as ‘sending positive signals’ to students who adjust their behaviour accordingly and prepare better (Bean and Peterson, 1998:33). Where researchers define class

participation this tends to be by reference to elements which are relatively easy to observe and measure. In online learning this takes place via discussion forums. Learner engagement in online courses is defined as 'posting regularly to the forum, at least two or three times per week' (Vai and Sosulski, 2011:136). Both the number of posts and the time intervals between each one are used as assessment criteria recommended to count for between 15 and 30% of an overall course assessment grade (Vai and Sosulski, 2011). Rocca's (2010:188) definition of face-to-face class contribution comprises 'asking questions, raising one's hand, and making comments'. Hence, definitions stress visually auditable elements whilst excluding other less easily observable indicators such as active listening or note taking. Whilst some assessment rubrics incorporate more inclusive criteria, including preparation for class, the vast majority only appear to identify visibly performative elements.

Performativity

A key assumption of the student engagement movement are that students should be rewarded for the 'time and effort' they put into their studies (McCormick and Kinzie, 2014:14). Participation through active learning processes, both individually and in groups, is an integral part of this outlook. However, such expectations may also be viewed from the alternative perspective of performativity. While this concept has multiple associations, performativity has become widely understood in terms of market-driven organizational and regulatory expectations affecting modern professionals, notably including teachers and university academics. Ball (2003:216), in writing about teachers, defines performativity as 'a technology, a culture and a mode of regulation that employs judgements, comparisons and displays as means of incentive, control,

attrition and change – based on rewards and sanctions (both material and symbolic).' According to Ball, performativity leads to a ventriloquism that demands that teachers adopt a different, market-based language in order to report on their role and activities. This new vocabulary includes words like 'service provider' rather than teacher or 'good practice' instead of teaching, for example. This ventriloquism is often inauthentic leading to fabrication, both by individuals and organisations, to satisfy a 'game' to meet the demands and pressures of accountability with sufficiently convincing 'evidence' of 'continuous improvement'. Performativity is also connected with the erosion of trust in professionals (O'Neill, 2002) and the rise of an audit culture as the principles of financial auditing have been transferred to other professional contexts, such as higher education and medicine (Power, 1994; 1997). Two effects of performativity are to re-orientate patterns of behaviour to meet the demands of audit and, by definition, to render non-audited elements of practice invisible (Murray, 2012). Other effects include a loss of trust (O'Neill, 2002), the encouragement of inauthentic behaviour (Ball, 2003) and the punishment of non-compliance, through, for example, non-submission to a national research audit assessment (Lucas, 2006).

The concept of performativity has been previously applied to the work of the public service professions but may also be considered in relation to the role of the university student. In this context it has been defined as the measurement of observable student behaviours and attitudes which are audited in a public as opposed to private learning space (Macfarlane, 2015). Student performativity may be understood more widely by reference to existentialism and the dramaturgical metaphor in social interactions (Goffman, 1959). Conventionally, in a student learning context, performativity is associated with girls or young women hiding their intelligence

and playing a more passive role in class in order to conform to a gender stereotype (Goffman, 1959). Performativity is often connected with playing gender roles (Butler, 1990) but it applies to any social role including, by extension, being a student. Sartre, for example, recognized that students must often *perform* learning in class.

> The attentive pupil who wishes to be attentive, his eyes riveted on the teacher, his ears open wide, so exhausts himself in playing the attentive role that he ends up no longer hearing anything.
>
> Sartre (1957:60)

This paper, therefore, will look at the extent to which performative forms for assessment are now embedded in the university curriculum and the attitudes of students hold towards the use of attendance registers, class contribution grading and group grading practice in this context.

Method and sample

The research was based on a questionnaire asking second and third year undergraduate students at a university in Hong Kong to respond to a series of statements about the extent to which performative forms of assessment such as attendance registers, class contribution grades and the assessment of group work assignments are used and to provide open comments on their use. Previous work had focused on building evidence of university policies through desk-based research (Macfarlane, 2013) and developing a conceptual understanding of student

performativity (Macfarlane, 2015). However, this work did not investigate the practice environment or the perspectives of students towards such developments. Hence, the questionnaire was designed in order to provide a finer-grained understanding of the extent to which performative expectations and associated forms of assessment are now part of the university curriculum and the perspectives held by students toward these developments. This necessitated the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data via a questionnaire in order to meet the two purposes of the research study. The quantitative element of the questionnaire was analysed using descriptive statistics. The qualitative element, which asked respondents to complete open comment sections, was analysed using grounded theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The qualitative data was analysed inductively using the constant comparison method (Glazer and Strauss, 1967). This involved comparing the datum several times through coding and recoding in order to identify the overarching common themes and patterns.

The questionnaire was targeted at all second and third year undergraduates of the University, the total population of which at the time was 6,607. Responses were returned by 299 students representing a sample of 4.5%. The sample collected was slightly over-representative of female undergraduates comprising 64.2% of respondents compared with a 52.7% of the actual population. Correspondingly, 35.8% of respondents were male whereas the population was 47.3%. Almost three quarters of students were aged between 17 and 21 (73.7%) with the remaining quarter all aged between 22 and 30 (26.3%). The University does not collect information with respect to the age profile of incoming undergraduates and so the extent to which the responses collected were representative of the population could not be verified.

Participants were drawn from all undergraduate subject areas consisting of business and economics (18.8 %), education (15.7%), medicine (12.6%), social sciences (9.9%), engineering and architecture (10.2%), medicine (8.9%), Arts (8.2%), Science (7.1%), Law (0.7%) and students studying for a double major (7.8%). Business and economics accounted for the largest number of responses from a single subject area (18.8%) accurately reflecting the extent to which this subject accounts for the total undergraduate student population (18.1%). The sample collected for social science (9.9%) was also only a slightly below the population percentage for this subject area (11%). However, overall, the sample tended to somewhat under-represent some of the hard science subjects, such as engineering and medicine where responses collected (10.2% and 8.9%) were lower than the population as a whole (13.5% and 14.7% respectively).

91% of the sample of second and third year undergraduate students were from Hong Kong with others hailing from Europe (4.8%), Mainland China (2.4%), Australasia (1.0%) and North America (0.8%). This reflects the population of undergraduate students as a whole the overwhelming proportion of which (92.3%) are drawn from the local Hong Kong community, 94% of which are ethnic Chinese. Whilst students from Mainland China make up the majority of the postgraduate population of the institution, a pattern reflected across other universities in Hong Kong, undergraduates tend to largely be Hong Kong Cantonese.

Performative assessment in the curriculum

The evidence from the questionnaire indicates that performative forms of monitoring and assessment are now commonplace in the undergraduate curriculum. Most students experience the

use of attendance registers at least to some extent with just 4.4% indicating that they never do. One fifth of respondents indicated that attendance registers are always used whilst a further two fifths confirmed that they are often used. Female students (61.7%) were slightly more likely to experience attendance registers than male students (55.2%) either often or always[1]. This may be partly explained by disciplinary differences which show that students taking degrees in teacher training and education science (86.9) are the most likely to encounter the use of an attendance register followed by business and economics (59.2%). Engineering and architecture, where the proportion of male students is conventionally higher, were the least likely (33.3%) to experience attendance registers[2].

Students were also asked about the role of in-class assessments, such as tests and oral presentations. These are in widespread use with over 70% of students normally undergoing them. They are used extensively in most subject areas, particularly education (82.6%) and social sciences (79.3%), although slightly less so in the medical and health-related sciences where just under 60% of students commented on their use as taking place often or always. Online discussion boards also play an important role in both engaging and monitoring student contributions in a virtual teaching environment. There are quite stark differences in the uptake of this tool for assessment purposes though across subject areas with students in education (91.3%), for example, reporting much higher levels of usage than counterparts in engineering (30%) or medicine (24.3%).

Figure 1 HERE

[1] Subsequently the combined percentage of respondents indicating 'often' or always' will be reported unless otherwise indicated

[2] Analysis based on subject areas with at least 30 respondents.

The results indicate that class contribution grades are part of the mainstream experience of undergraduate students at the university. More than 56% indicated that they have been awarded an individual grade on the basis of their contribution in class whilst just 5% had never encountered this form of assessment. Almost 80% of students are normally expected to contribute to class discussion. Disciplinary differences though are quite striking and the use of class contribution grading is much more common in the humanities and social science areas (eg 82.8% in social sciences) than in science and engineering (eg 29.7% in medicine).

Responses also indicated that the grading of group tasks or assignments is overwhelmingly part of the regular experience of university students with just over 2% never encountering this form of assessment. While group assessment is experienced by around two thirds of students in medicine (64.5%) it is ubiquitous for students in business and economics (94.5%) and the social sciences (93.1%). The differences in the extent to which class contribution grading and group assessment are used across the disciplines may reflect the use of signature pedagogies such as case studies in business and management studies intended for class discussion or oral presentations based on group analysis.

Figure 2 HERE

The questionnaire also sought out the qualitative comments of students in respect to the matters raised. Comments[3] in the free section of the questionnaire focused mainly on three themes: attendance, class participation, and, to a lesser extent, group work. In analyzing the comments a division emerged between *learning-based* and *rights-based* arguments made by students. The

[3] Subsequent reporting of student comments will identify their subject area in an abbreviated form.

former category refers to arguments based on whether particular assessment tools are effective as a means of developing student learning. The latter refers to arguments pertaining to assessment issues which are seen as negatively affecting student rights or general perceptions with respect to fairness and justice.

Theme 1: Attendance

Students were overwhelmingly critical of the use of attendance registers. Only a small minority of respondents supported the idea of compulsory class attendance arguing that it is a student's responsibility to attend and a signifier of respect for the teacher and fellow students.

> Attending class shows respect to peers and the lecturers (Education)

> Being punctual is very important to show respect for the professor (Medicine)

Many of the criticisms of attendance registers were rights-based represented by the view that students are adults or mature learners and should be entitled to choose how to best use their time and take the consequences of such choices accordingly. Some respondents made unflattering parallels between university and school cultures in terms of the latter granting no greater degree of personal autonomy than the former. These comments assert that attendance should be a student's freedom of choice rather than something they are compelled to do by registers or the threat of punishments.

> I think students should have the right to choose if and when to attend class at university because university students are mature enough to choose (Medicine)

> University students are mature enough to judge whether to attend class. So they should have the right to choose. (Education)

> Most university students are adults and they know what they will gain or lose if they attend the class (Arts)

Other objections to attendance registers were essentially learning-based. Students argued that attendance requirements do not necessarily produce learning benefits or foster student responsibility and that there are other equally valid ways of learning besides attending classes. Respondents identified poor teaching as the main reason why students do not attend class and some of these comments identified the teacher as the person responsible for making their classes interesting rather than relying on attendance registers to compel attendance. In-class assessments, such as tests and oral presentations are associated with teachers using attendance proxies to ensure the physical or virtual presence of students (eg quizzes, tests, group work, compulsory on-line postings and hand-outs only available in class).

> University students are mature enough to choose the way they learn that suits them best. (Education)

> Why is attendance important when students can catch up by reading and learn themselves? That's why I think taking attendance is really not important (Business and economics)

> Skipping lessons is a common phenomenon. But professors should reflect whether its the responsibility of students or is it that the lecture is too boring? (Social sciences)

> Quality of teaching should be the factor which affects students to attend class, instead of assessments and attendance taking (Business and economics)

> In engineering, attendance is almost never taken, and many lecturers resort to other measures to ensure students attend class, such as giving out solutions to problems only during lectures and refusing to provide them on-line (Engineering)

Theme 2: Class participation grading

Whilst the assessment literature offers considerable support for the use of class participation and justification for class contribution grading only a minority of respondents felt this latter practice can be beneficial by developing their professional or work-related skills, making the learning environment more active. The vast majority of responses identified negative implications of grading class contributions. Learning-based criticisms were focused on the inappropriateness of

this form of assessment for students who are shy, quiet, or prefer other learning styles; and the way such grading practice overlooks other forms of participation;

> I think that participation in class (e.g. answering questions in class) should not be one of the assessment factors as some students are not that talkative. They may express their opinions in words much better rather than speaking. (Arts)

There was also the rights-based perception that class contribution grades are unfair and impressionistic. Concerns were expressed about a lack of transparency regarding how grades are derived and the limited opportunities available for all students to meet such criteria given time restrictions and the fact that some students are shy.

> Participation grades are impression marking and depends on the professor's impression without objective criteria (Social sciences)

> Sometimes students are encouraged to speak up in class and professors grade them on what they. However, there is bias from professors towards some students so some students easily get a good grade (Business and economics)

> I think the assessment structure (principle) should be more clear [sic], especially for grading in-class discussion (Education)

> Students participation in class is not a fair means of assessment because not everyone gets a chance to contribute and time is limited, and some students may be shy (Business and economics)

A further concern was that contribution grades might constrain free discussion as students are 'forced' to contribute. Examples given included the use of online discussion boards where comments are required rather than voluntary. The word 'force' or 'forced' was used 35 times in all comments, almost always in a negative context.

The overwhelming majority of respondents were Chinese students from Hong Kong and a few chose to highlight cultural barriers to participative forms of assessment.

> I strongly doubt that in an Asian culture group discussion and in-class participation is welcome and useful (Science)

> I feel that XXX [ie the University] lacks an interactive learning environment. Perhaps a lot of the locals are scared to participate in class (Business and economics)

Whilst respect for teachers and peers was cited by some students as a reason for justifying attendance registers, respect was understood from an alternative perspective in relation to class contribution grading. Here, a concern was widely expressed that such a practice tends to overlook a student's right to reticence and possible preference for other learning styles.

> teachers should also respect students who prefer to stay quiet (Business and economics)

> some students do not prefer voicing out their opinions in class but are still committed to the subject (Arts)

> some students may not love speaking but that does mean they do not know the answer (Science)

> I think that participation in class (e.g. answering questions in class) should not be one of the assessment factors as some students are not that talkative. They may express their opinions in words much better rather than speaking (Arts)

> I think debating in tutorials should be optional because there are students who feel nervous to say something in front of other people, and it will make them embarrassed to say anything by force (Arts)

Aside from concerns about the appropriateness of class contribution grading on the basis of student preferences, respondents further highlighted the more general criticism that speaking in class should be a matter of free expression without pressure, fear or grading attached.

> I think use of moodle should not be used as a contribution mark. The statements should not be assessed. Students should have the freedom to express what they think whether they are right or wrong (Education)

> I think students should be free to express their opinion in the class but the content of speech should not be marked or graded (Education)

> I think that the in-class participation like in-class group discussion should be encouraged but they should not be assessed as this will give students pressure in speaking and expressing their own opinion freely (Double degree)

Finally, there was a keen awareness among students of the performative dimension of this form of assessment resulting in game-playing behaviours. These performances, such as speaking in class to get the attention of the teacher or post an online comment to a discussion forum to satisfy a quantitative requirement, are designed to meet the assessment criteria without engaging deeply or meaningfully in the learning process, the opposite effect of one intended by those that advocate the adoption of such assessment tools. Student comments revealed an understanding of the difference between attendance at class and genuine engagement in learning.

> On-line discussion forums are good in facilitating knowledge exchange, but using the number of posts/responses as an indication of participation is not preferable. One should be assessed on quality of work instead of the quantity. (Double degree)

> Students may attend class just because of wanting to have attendance taken but not really learning (Arts)

> Students should not be forced to speak up because people make meaningless points just for grades and slow down the class schedule (Business and economics)

> "Counting the number of times a student posts" should not be used for assessment (Business and economics)

> I do think that class participation should not be graded because students should have the right to speak or not. Grading class participation forces students to speak, without thinking thoroughly. Adversely, it may affect the progress in class. Some students may speak too much. (Double degree)

Whilst class contribution grading was recognized as distorting patterns of student behaviour in these ways the invisibility of other forms of non-audited engagement were also acknowledged.

> There is no grading assessment on attitude or incentive to learn other than participation in class. Participation should not be the sole mediator on attitude (Social sciences)

> I don't think remaining silent necessarily means not paying attention in class. There are many students who listen to the lecturer all the time but do not say anything. It is not fair to them to claim they didn't participate in class. (Business and economics)

<u>Theme 3: Group work</u>

Students were highly critical of grading processes which fail to recognize unequal levels of contribution within groups. The recognition of individual contributions appears to be rare even though students expressed the belief that this would be fairer than awarding a single group grade. Ten comments alone referred critically to the effect of 'free-riders'. It was, perhaps, surprising that students were familiar with this specialist term especially as it was not employed as part of the questionnaire. One student, who did not specifically employ the term 'free-rider', nonetheless provided a definition of this phenomenon:

> Some members do not contribute anything but get the same grade as others (Science)

One or two comments did acknowledge that group work can be helpful for problem-solving but all comments contained qualifies with respect to concerns about the fairness of awarding a group assessment grade without regard to individual levels of contribution. Just one respondent referred to a learning-based criticism of group work on the basis of different learning styles.

> I think the assessment method should allow for different learning style of students. Some prefer studying alone while some prefer learning in groups. (Law)

Other remarks were focused on the ill-effects of 'free-riders' and perceptions of unfairness in group assessment and included the following:

> Students should always be graded individually and it is so unfair when they meet irresponsible students as group mates. It is not that the students fail to communicate, but they bear an unreasonable burden to work on a group project alone (Double degree)

> I think student should be judged individually because there are many free-riders (Business and economics)

> Group assignments have too many random variables that may affect the fairness of assessment (Social sciences)

Performativity and responsibilisation

The findings from this study illustrate the performative turn in the assessment of student learning at university. In academic life the distortion in patterns of behaviour through audit and the decline in the importance of non-audited elements is often evidenced through an increasing prioritization of research productivity and a declining level of commitment with respect to non-audited service and academic citizenship roles (Macfarlane, 2007; Murray, 2012). Students feel the effects of performativity via a heightened emphasis on vocal loquacity, presenteeism (via attendance registers and attendance proxies) and a demonstrable preference for collaborative learning in assessment regimes. Non-compliance with these requirements is punished via lower grades for attendance and class contribution. The audit of these visible elements of student engagement may be contrasted with non-audited or less visible aspects such as active listening and effective note-taking in class or individual contributions in group work projects. Where class contribution grading is used behaviour among students can be distorted resulting in inauthentic

patterns to satisfy performative assessment demands. The loss of trust associated with academic as professionals (O'Neill, 2002) is mirrored in the lives of students by the widespread use of attendance monitoring. The evidence suggests that the use of attendance registers is resented by students and symbolizes a loss of trust. Other recent research has also found that negative feelings associated with assessment such as being monitored (or watched and controlled) are among the most commonly expressed by university students (Brown and Wang, 2013).

Students are sensitive to differential learning benefits of performative assessment according to personality types and preferences in learning styles. To some extent this finding acts as a salutary reminder of the classic literature in this area which indicates that more introverted students are capable of doing well in using their own individual study methods whereas more extroverted students perform better in seminars where oral participation is used. (Entwistle and Entwistle, 1970; Furnham, 1992; Furnham and Medhurst, 1995). The widespread use of performative forms of assessment signals a shift that provides more challenges for the introvert, shy or simply quiet individual now increasingly defined as a deviant in the university learning environment and society at large (Reda, 2009; Scott, 2006).

The findings of this study may further be understood in considering the extent to which the technology of 'responsibilisation' operates to legitimise the performative turn in the assessment of university students. Originally conceived as a characteristic of neo-liberal government to control individuals and reduce welfare commitments, responsibilisation involves convincing citizens to understand social risks, such as unemployment, which will arise unless they regard such problems as within their own self-control (Rose, 1990). The concept of responsibilisation

has also been used in reference to the criminal justice system and the role of third parties (Garland, 1996). In the context of university teaching justifications for attendance rules, for example, are often related to the need for students to take more responsibility for their own learning including the importance of attendance as developing a work-related aptitude (Macfarlane, 2013). Some of the free comments illustrated student ventriloquism of the responsibilisation agenda mirroring those of teachers in respect to performativity noted earlier in the paper (Ball, 2003):

> I think attending class is the responsibility of a student. If they choose not to attend I think its disrespectful (Engineering)

> We should educate students how to be disciplined and pay respect to their lecturers (Business and economics)

> Being punctual is very important to show respect for the professor (Medicine)

However, using the word count function to identify key vocabulary it is clear that overall students are more supportive of a libertarian view of university learning rather than the responsibilisation agenda (see fig. 3). Students mainly tended to use words such as ‘responsible’ or ‘irresponsibility’ to refer to their own duty, as they call it, to attend classes. Occasionally the word was also used to refer to the ‘responsibility’ of professors to teach in an interesting style. The word ‘respect(fullness)’ was most commonly applied in relation to the rationale for why students should attend lectures and was often used both in demonstrating this virtue to peers as

well as professors. Other terms indicative of student's accepting and verbalizing the responsibilisation agenda included self-motivation (5), co-operation (3), discipline or self-discipline (3) and time management (3). Despite the influence of the language of responsibilisation, an alternative, more libertarian lexicon represented by words such as choose/choice (80), freedom (49) and rights (22) was more commonly expressed. These words were used in the context of comments critical to attendance rules, class contribution grades and group grading. Students placed an emphasis on what they regarded as their freedom of choice in engaging with learning at university.

Figure 3 HERE

Conclusion

The student engagement literature has hitherto largely overlooked student perspectives with respect to issues of fairness and rights in regard to their learning experience. Instead, student satisfaction questionnaires, such as the UKs National Student Survey, tend to collect data on attitudes to assessment which are confined to understanding of criteria, the timeliness of feedback, the clarity and detail of comments and fairness in the narrower context of marking practice. Moreover, 'student voice' is often buried beneath by an overriding emphasis on quantitative data (Grebennikov and Shah, 2013). Performative expectations, in the shape of attendance and class contribution grading, have profoundly changed what it means to be a higher education student. This now increasingly evaluates social and behavioural skills in a public learning space rather than individual intellectual understanding in a largely private one. Despite

the purported benefits in terms of student learning this shift in assessment patterns is a cause for concern among students. They see some of the effects of this shift as undermining their freedom to make choices as mature adults leading to game playing behaviours to meet performative demands.

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Figure 1: Attendance and attendance proxies (n. 299)

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Attendance registers are taken at class	4.4	36.2	39.2	20.1
In-class assessments, such as tests and oral presentations, are used	1.4	21.8	50.6	20.8
Online discussion boards are used for assessment	12.3	41.6	29.0	17.1

Figure 2: Participative assessment (n. 299)

	Never	Rarely	Often	Always
Students are awarded an individual grade on the basis of their contribution in class	5.1	38.2	42.0	14.7
Students are expected to contribute to class discussion	3.1	17.7	50.2	29.0
There is assessment grading of group tasks or assignments	2.4	13.3	46.8	37.5

Figure 3: The language of libertarianism and responsibilisation

Responsibilisation		Libertarianism	
Responsible/Responsibility Irresponsible/Irresponsibility	30	Choose/Choice	80
Respect(fulness) Disrespect(fulness)	15	Freedom	49
co-operation (3), discipline or self-discipline (3) and time management (3)	9	Rights	22
Motivation /Self-motivation	5	Express/ Expression	17